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Special Issue Call for Papers

Organizational change failure: Framing the process of failing

Guest Editors:

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Read the full call for papers here:

http://www.tavainstitute.org/humanrelations/special_issues/ChangeFailure.html

Submission deadline: 01 December 2018 (submissions will not be considered before 01 November 2018)

Objective and rationale for the special issue

Despite what we know about how organizations and its members respond to change, organizations continue to spend an inordinate amount of time confronting failure and attempting to learn from failing in order to continue growing. Despite this attention, failure still conjures vivid images of losing and despair and has come to represent the antithesis of what change is supposed to represent. To "feel like a failure" is a damning incarnation of this phenomenon, and indicates the connection between achievement and personal identity.

Consequently, while it is widely acknowledged that some degree of failure in organizations is pervasive, and ultimately, unavoidable, critical scholarly attention continues to focus on common questions and themes related to managing and surviving failure, or questioning the implications of failing, especially in the context of organizational change (Mellahi and Wilkinson, 2010; Sitkin, 1992). After all, given its consequences, although organizational research has long been concerned with the features of and mechanisms for how organizations change, it is equally well-acknowledged that large scale organizational changes tend to fail (often invoking Beer and Nohria, 2000 in doing so).

When organizational change and growth are unsuccessful, it unsettles assumptions of the self and of the institution, often stigmatizing those associated with the failure (those "being" a failure). Hence, when failure takes shape, those on the receiving end of change are exposed to various conflicting organizational practices that threaten their sense of self-worth, job security and organizational commitment. On one hand, some organizations will attempt to de-emphasize the failure or minimise its impact to avoid losing face (e.g., to their customers). Yet on the other, within the organization a strong blame game and witch hunt may unfold in the aftermath of change. This antithesis has an impact on how change recipients experience, feel, make sense, cope with, and learn or fail to learn from change failure. Even in organizations that learn from having a failure culture, individuals still struggle with the process of uncovering failure or applying subsequent knowledge to inform future actions. Notwithstanding a tendency of organizational research to reflect broader societal ideology of success and the need to manage for survival, there is still scope to capture our understanding of how individuals and collectives deal with change failure, when the expectation is one of success.

For this special issue, we seek papers that help expand our understanding of the context, processes and mechanisms that underlie organizational change failure. In the context of this forum, organizational change failure encompasses an organization's deterioration or the deviation from goals that are expected and desired from organizational change (Cannon and Edmondson, 2001).

Aims and scope of the special issue

The goal of the special issue is to enhance knowledge and advance theory regarding the processes and mechanisms that underlie the emergence of organizational change failure by combining insights from psychology, sociology, complexity sciences, and institutional perspectives. This subject area of change failure is specific to understanding how individuals and collectives cope with failing when the organizational focus is specifically linked to the terminal goal of successful change. For instance, an organization that adopts a systems and process change only to fail to reach these goals; how do employees deal with, cope with, or accept this downgrading, especially those that impact directly on their work role? What happens to individuals and collectives when they realize that failure is occurring but feel helpless to stop it while still suffering its consequences? Conversely, how does failure to change become normalized and accepted by the individual and collective he or she is part of? Furthermore, what are the behavioral features and characteristics of accepting failure to change, especially for those individuals who are part of a visible, publicly announced change or a change directly linked to identity and self-worth? Besides our attempt to better understand how individuals and collectives make sense, or ascribe meaning to change failure, develop coping strategies and eventually accept it, we are also interested in better understanding why some individuals and collectives fail to learn from past change failure, whereas others are more successful at it. Finally, another unexplored area is how the decisions we make increase or decrease the probability of change failure. These and many other questions regarding change failure remain uncharted research territory.

We recognize the work already done on the subject that variously accounts for coping with failure (Shepherd et al., 2011), the positive psychology associated with failing (Seligman, 2011), learning from failure (Shepherd and Cardon, 2009), role of decision-making errors in failure (Lord, Dinh and Hoffman, 2015), consequences of failure (Anheier, 1999), and explaining failure (Cannon and Edmondson, 2001), in the context of organizational change. Despite the in-roads made through research on well-established themes such as escalation of commitment, groupthink, sense making, risk-taking, and learning norms, we seek a contemporary focus by combining insights from psychology, sociology, complexity sciences and institutional theory in explaining failure specific to change. Specifically, we invite contributions that address this process.

Indicative themes and possible issues

We welcome both quantitative and qualitative studies, and especially seek research that relies on multiple sources of data, incorporates multiple levels of analyses, uses multiple methods, and is longitudinal by design.

Some research themes and questions of potential interest include but are not limited to:

- Attitudes to change failure
- Antecedents, outcomes, and underlying beliefs in change failure
- Accepting or rejecting change failure
- The role of change in dealing with failure
- Coping with (and strategies for) change failure
- Trust and change failure
- Job satisfaction, motivation, and belief and change failure
- Failing and individual and group responses
- Collective behavior from change failure
- Reasoning about change failure (beyond groupthink, Abilene paradox, etc.)
- Cognitive and interpretative features of change failure
- Sensemaking or meaning making from change failure
- Social action and values associated with change failure
- Impact of failure to change on organizational change and change commitment
- Decision-making errors that lead to organizational change failure within uncertain environments
- Normalization of change failure

Contributors should note:

- This call is open and competitive, and the submitted papers will be double-blind reviewed by experienced scholars in the field.
- Submitted papers must be based on original material not accepted by, or under consideration with, any other journal or outlet.
- For empirical papers based on data sets from which multiple papers have been generated, authors must provide the Guest Editors with copies of all other papers based on the same data.
- The guest editors will select a limited number of papers to be included in the special issue. At the discretion of the Editor-in-Chief, other papers submitted to the special issue may be considered for publication in other issues of the journal.
- To be considered for this special issue, as well as fitting this call for papers, submissions must fit with the Aims and Scope of *Human Relations*:
http://www.tavainstitute.org/humanrelations/submit_paper/guidance.html
- Papers should also adhere to the Journal's submissions requirements relating to originality, length, and formatting: http://www.tavainstitute.org/humanrelations/submit_paper/how_to_submit.html.
- Papers should be submitted through the online system <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/hr>.
- Please indicate in your covering letter that your article is intended for this special issue.

Prior to the initial submission deadline, authors who have questions about a potential project, are encouraged to contact one of the Special Issue Guest Editors:

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Please direct questions about the submission process, or any administrative matter, to the Editorial Office:
humanrelationsjournal@tavainstitute.org.

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